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'SELF-CHOOSING' AND 'RIGHT-ACTING' IN THE NATIONALISM OF GIUSEPPE MAZZINI

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1. INTRODUCTION

Most of the secondary literature on Mazzini's political thought concentrates on his attitude to individual liberty. Some authors have described Mazzini as a liberal nationalist.[1] Others have stressed the totalitarian potential of his thought.[2] Mazzini's latest biographer regards him as so confused as to render his political ideas unworthy of study.[3] This article instead asks: what sort of nationalist was Mazzini? The nation was, after all, the central concern of both Mazzini's writings and his career.

It is common to make a distinction between a 'French' and a 'German' style of nationalism. Sometimes these two are labelled 'political' and 'cultural' or 'subjectivist' and 'objectivist'. It is of course wrong to conceive of German nationalism as uninterested in politics or French nationalism as unconcerned with culture. The contrast between the two is which comes first. The French type of nationalism stresses the political will of a group of people to live together as a united nation. Cultural unity flows from and is normatively demanded by a prior political unity. In contrast, the German style of nationalism stresses the existence of a common culture as being essential to nationhood. Political unity is facilitated and normatively demanded by a prior cultural unity. French nationalism is subjectivist in that individuals choose their nationality. The nation is created by the political will of individuals. This was classically expressed by Renan's characterisation of the nation as an 'everyday plebiscite', even though Renan himself stressed the common history of nations. German nationalism is objectivist in that individuals cannot choose their nationality. Nationality is determined by inherited cultural and ethnic traits.

2. FRANCE AND THE SUBJECTIVIST DEFINITION OF THE NATION

Statements of the French definition of the nation as the product of the political will of its members are frequently found in Mazzini's writings.[4] He called for a 'National Contract' which echoed Rousseau's *Social Contract* and the National Assembly of the French Revolution.[5] Mazzini also approved of the General Will as a 'fitting foundation for governments'.[6] Despite adopting the subjectivist definition of the nation and deriving much inspiration from the key events and texts of the French Revolution, Mazzini was no Francophile.

One of the most frequent themes of Mazzini's writings was his vehement rejection of what he called the 'French initiative'. This preoccupation dated back to his earliest revolutionary experiences with the Carbonari. The political theory and revolutionary strategy of Mazzini's Young Italy were in many ways direct reactions to his earlier involvement with the Carbonari. For Mazzini one of the most infuriating characteristics of that organisation was its ideological and political reliance on the French. In Mazzini's opinion, the Carbonari's political programme consisted of little more than an importation of the French Revolution. Also, they were inclined to wait for the beginning of an Europe-wide revolution in Paris, rather than taking the initiative themselves. This made sense in the context of recent Italian history. The closest that Italy had come to being a united Republic had been under French Revolutionary rule. Mazzini's own father had served as an official of the Ligurian Republic in that time. As a teenager Mazzini read his father's large collection of newspapers from the French Revolution. Later in Mazzini's career, after the demise of the Carbonari, he still thought that revolutionaries relied excessively on the outdated ideas of the French Revolution. Also, his 'Moderate' rivals who took a gradualist approach to Italian nationalism (constitutional monarchy, limited franchise extension, federalism) allied themselves with the French regimes of Louis Philippe and Louis Napoleon, both of whom Mazzini saw as corrupt opportunists.

The notion that France should provide political and ideological leadership to Europe was, of course, also popular among Frenchmen. One of the most impressive proponents of this idea was the historian Jules Michelet. He wrote,

> You [France] are no longer a nation only, you are a principle, a great political principle … Live for the salvation of mankind … glorious mother, who is not only ours, but whose mission is to nurse every nation into liberty … [to spread] the gospel of equality … [and] universal love. [When France invaded Belgium in 1792] she came as Justice, as eternal reason, asking men for nothing but to realise their own best thoughts, to make their own right triumph. How little she thought of her own interests. She had only one, the salvation of nations.[7]

Mazzini gave two reasons for rejecting this interpretation of France's role in history. Firstly, he objected to the assumption of the inequality of nations. Mazzini again and again asserted the equality of nations.[8] Soon after Young Italy's foundation Mazzini founded Young Europe. It was premised on the idea that European nations were equal and that nationalist groups from different countries could co-operate without being subordinate to the leadership of one country like France. However, Mazzini did frequently write about an 'initiator-people'. This seemed to involve a country leading by example rather than invading other countries and forcing a supposedly progressive constitution on them.

The second reason why Mazzini rejected Michelet's belief that France was the saviour of nations was that the French Revolution had no conception of nationalism and was only concerned with asserting the rights of individuals.

This meant that France was unqualified to be the initiator-people of a new era. Mazzini thought that Michelet and other historians were mistaken in interpreting the French Revolution as being as much about the liberation of oppressed peoples as it was about individual rights. He admitted that there were some suggestions of the principle of national self-determination in some of the more marginal pronouncements and events of the Revolution. He thought that the essence of the Revolution was to be found among the writings of its key ideologues and the Instructions to the National Assembly. From his analysis of Voltaire, Montesquieu and Rousseau he concluded that none of them had a genuine idea of national self-determination. According to Mazzini they all saw politics as an arena merely for the satisfaction of the individual. He wrote of the Instructions to the National Assembly:

> Now this is the only vital point to be noted. The Instructions, important as they are, and based in great part on truth, show a consciousness, neither of the *mission*, of life, nor of a collective *end*, nor of a law of Progress, as a *method*, nor of *association* as a *means*, nor of aught else that passes beyond the horizon dimly viewed from the Christian heaven, or the science of the individual.[9]

Mazzini saw the 'principle of nationality' as just one of many applications of the 'principle of association'. Association meant that groups would dedicate themselves to a particular 'mission' which would aid the progress of mankind. A group formed merely to further the narrow interests of its members was not an association. Michelet thought that in the French Revolution the French people had dedicated themselves to the mission of liberating oppressed peoples. Mazzini denied this. He thought the French Revolution was only an assertion of individual rights. This interpretation of the French Revolution is also illustrated by Mazzini's attitude to Rousseau.

Rousseau wrote in *The Social Contract* that

> [T]he general will is always rightful and always tends to the public good; but it does not follow that the deliberations of the people are always equally right. We always want what is advantageous to us but we do not always discern it. The people is never corrupted, but it is often misled, and only then does it seem to will what is bad.[10]

Mazzini agreed that it was wrong to say that 'the deliberations of the people were always right'. The measures he proposed to ensure that the people were not 'misled' were very similar to those of Rousseau. Mazzini thought that pluralism in education could distract people from the national mission. Mazzini hoped that political and cultural institutions would help to ensure that the people were kept on a high level of patriotic virtue. Like Rousseau he placed great emphasis on the foundation of a new polity. The role in which Mazzini saw the revolutionary elite, and especially himself, was very like that of the Rousseauean Legislator.

According to Rousseau, "the general will studies only the common interest while the will of all studies private interest, and is indeed no more than the sum of individual desires".[11] In order to produce the general will the people had to

vote as citizens of the polity and not as private individuals or members of 'partial associations'. F.M. Barnard describes this union of individual will and community standards an attempt to achieve the identity of 'self-choosing' and 'right-acting'.[12] Mazzini also tried to achieve a fusion of self-choosing and right-acting. Like Barnard, Mazzini thought Rousseau believed in self-choosing but his fundamental objection to Rousseau was that he was not interested in right-acting. Mazzini agreed with much of the thinking behind the concept of the general will. However, ultimately his version of right-acting was based on a universal religion rather than any notion of procedural justice. Mazzini paid little attention to such matters. Institutional minutiae were, in his opinion, the province of 'liberals' who thought that government existed for the material benefit of men rather than to organise them in the pursuit of a religious ideal.[13] Only religion would stir men from the pursuit of their own selfish interests and ensure that they did not vote according to partial wills. Mazzini thought that Italian revolutionaries' anti-religious stance made it more difficult for them to gain popular support. He wanted to harness the religious instincts of the common people. Mazzini's own upbringing was a combination of republicanism and religion. Mazzini's mother was an ardent republican and an equally zealous Jansenist. Mazzini shared her belief in the equal political and spiritual potential of all human beings.

Mazzini wrote,

> The General Will is a fitting foundation for governments, but where the general principles which regulate the moral world are not evidenced in their acts, where they are not reduced to maxims, to recognised laws, there will never be a General Will. The discovery of these principles and the deduction of their inviolability, by proving them of origin superior to the power of the individual is precisely the task of the present civilisation … Religion, superior to philosophy — is the bond that unites men in the communion of a recognised generating Principle, and in the consciousness of a common tendency and mission; it is the *Word* which shall raise the standard of *Humanity* in the midst of the nations of the earth.[14]

Mazzini thought that Rousseau's general will was lacking in religious content. According to Rousseau, Christianity was the 'holy and sublime true religion' but it was too unworldly to serve as the religion of the state.[15] He believed that each polity should have a 'civil' religion that was exclusively its own and could inspire patriotic virtue in citizens, especially in war against other countries. Mazzini abhorred such a Machiavellian rejection of true religion for reasons of state. He did believe that religion should inspire patriotic virtue in citizens. However, Mazzini's civil religion was also universal and he intended it to inculcate in his citizens a duty to the progress of humanity and not a warlike xenophobia. He thought that Rousseau relied on individual interest rather than true religion to bind his society together. He derided Rousseau for not thinking of man as an 'essentially social creature'. Rousseau's political theory was essentially pessimistic and saw progress as the source of evil in human society. Mazzini's opinion was exactly the opposite. He had an optimistic belief in what would be a virtual heaven on earth. He believed in progress and the gradual improvement of mankind. Mazzini's ultimate verdict was that, "The Society of Rousseau … is

a mutual insurance society and nothing more".[16] It achieved self-choosing but was unconcerned with right-acting. This would be true even if the general will were achieved without the aid of a universal religion. Without the general will society would be characterised by individual egoism. If the general will were achieved, but was unconnected to universal religion, it would result in 'national egoism'. Rousseau's general will was supra-individual but it was still relativist and laid down no objective moral code for nations or for mankind. For Mazzini politics had to be linked to universal religion. This was also the opinion of another French thinker, Lamennais.

According to Hales, "Lamennais 'perfected Rousseau'" for Mazzini.[17] He added right-acting to the self-choosing of the Rousseauean general will. Lamennais believed that all sovereignty resided in the general will of the people because the mass of ordinary people were better placed than individuals, including monarchs and popes, to interpret the tradition of the Catholic Church. Progress consisted of the increasing liberty of the peoples which would result in an increasingly religious world. Thus, Lamennais answered all of Mazzini's objections to Rousseau. Lamennais' general will was not motivated by individual interest and it was not separate from universal religion and an awareness of progress. Mazzini admired not just Lamennais' content but also his style and his success. He intended his own *Faith and the Future* to be the nationalist equivalent of Lamennais' stirring and successful *Paroles d'un Croyant*.[18]

Also, Lammenais' intellectual biography was congenial to Mazzini. Lamennais was a priest who began his career as a passionate enemy of the French Revolution. He championed legitimate monarchy as the best means of protecting Catholicism. He became disillusioned with Gallicanism which he came to see as the subjection of the church to the state, rather than the protection of the church by the state. If the state was stifling religion it was necessary to make religion independent of the state and strong enough to sustain that independence. So, Lamennais adopted an ultramontane position. The Pope was to disappoint Lamennais too. He found that the Pope was too embroiled in temporal matters, and therefore too subservient to the Great Powers, to be a true defender of religion. The Moderates thought they could trust the Piedmontese King with the unification of Italy. Mazzini hoped that they would come to the same conclusion about the Piedmontese King as Lammenais had reached about the French King. In the 1840s the election of a new more liberal Pope gave rise to the idea that the Pope could lead the unification of Italy. This notion was formidably articulated by Gioberti in his *Primato*.[19] Mazzini considered Lammenais' humiliation by the Pope to be a good lesson for others who thought the Papacy was anything other than a corrupt and despotic institution. The best thing about Lamennais was his final destination. Mazzini wrote, "The cause of Lamennais was … our own".[20] Lammenais had the same immediate political objectives as Mazzini. According to Mazzini,

> [H]e proposed that a union should be formed among 'all those who, in spite, of the massacre of Poland, the dismemberment of Belgium, and the conduct of the

> pretended liberal governments, persisted in the hope that the nations would one day be free, and in the determination to labour towards that aim'.[21]

Both thinkers envisaged the fusion of self-choosing and right-acting similarly: nations would rule themselves by interpreting God's law. However, this did not answer the question of which groups of people constituted nations and therefore had the right to interpret God's law. Lamennais did not address this question. Mazzini rejected a simply subjectivist definition of the nation as it would mean self-choosing without right-acting. He combined the subjectivist definition of the nation with an objectivist definition that linked the nation to universal religion.

3. GERMANY AND THE OBJECTIVIST DEFINITION OF THE NATION

Ressentiment is an important factor in the formation of many nationalist ideologies. It occurs when one group is confronted by the culture of another group according to which the culture and/or society of the first group is inferior. This often leads to the 'transvaluation of values' which is the 'the transformation of the value scale of the [invading culture] in a way which denigrates the originally supreme values, replacing them with notions which are unimportant, external, or indeed bear in the original scale the negative sign'.[22] This process is clear in the formation of German nationalism. The French Enlightenment had portrayed French high culture as the epitome of rationalism, progress and civilisation. German culture was portrayed as low culture — the preserve of irrational, atavistic and uncivilised peasants. The most powerful 'German' of the eighteenth century, Frederick the Great of Prussia, said "I speak French to my mistress, Latin to my confessor, and High German to my horse". German thinkers, like Herder, performed a transvaluation of values championing German low culture as a desirable value. These thinkers created the 'Counter-Enlightenment' which asserted the superiority of German anti-French values: spontaneity versus artificiality, custom versus abstract law, relativism versus universalism. The Germans held an objectivist conception of the nation as based on an inherited culture as opposed to the French subjectivist conception based on the political will of rational individuals. Mazzini seemed to go through a similar process of transvaluation with regard to the political values of the French Revolution. He substituted duty for right and association for individualism. He identified with Herder and his Romantic successors. Indeed, Herder is the writer most often mentioned as having been an influence on Mazzini.[23]

Mazzini wrote,

> One and all, like Herder, we demand of the instinct of our conscience, a great religious Thought which may rescue us from doubt, a social faith which may save us from anarchy, a moral inspiration which may embody that faith in action, and keep us from idle contemplation.[24]

In contrast to Rousseau, Herder did not want to separate religion and politics or subordinate religion to politics. Barnard wrote of Herder, "To bring secular

values to religious fields and religious values to secular fields appears to have been his main resolve".[25] Similarly, Mazzini himself claimed

> My predominating idea, and the vital thought of all my labours, is this: a fatal separation has been established between religious and political belief, between heaven and earth … It is necessary to reunite earth and heaven, politics to the eternal principles which should direct them.[26]

Mazzini and Lamennais wanted to reunite 'religious and political belief' by justifying the political power of the people by their ability to interpret religion. They both believed in a theory of populist epistemology that justified their theory of popular sovereignty. This was another area in which Mazzini was in agreement with Herder. Mazzini thought that Romanticism provided an intellectual methodology that could interpret God's law, a task that Enlightenment rationalism would never be able to perform. He constantly asserted the superiority of 'synthesis', which he identified with the Romantics, over 'analysis', which he identified with rationalism and the French Revolution:

> The faculty of synthetical intuition, which alone gives us the power of embracing the idea of Life, in its unity and comprehending its law, has disappeared with the religious sentiment; giving place to a habit of dividing an intellectual question into fractions, and of fastening by turns upon one of its manifestations only; thus taking a part for the whole.[27]

Mazzini's 'faculty of synthetical intuition' was the equivalent of Herder's *Gestalt*. It was an intellectual method that aimed at grasping the unity amongst diversity of the world and the essential interconnectedness of its parts. Herder and Mazzini thought that just as the parts of the world were essentially interconnected and could not be fully understood except as a whole, the human mind could not be fully understood if it were to be falsely divided into different 'faculties'.[28] This would be especially so if one faculty — reason — were to be regarded as supreme. Synthesis, or *Gestalt*, would enable people to recognise the fundamental interconnectedness and harmony of interests of different human individuals and groups.

Like Herder Mazzini resented French influence in his country. Both thinkers wanted to unify the fields of politics and religion. Mazzini shared with Herder his rejection of Enlightenment rationalism. Herder is most famously associated with cultural nationalism. He is often presented as both the founder of German nationalism and the founder of the 'German' style of nationalism. Mazzini did not follow Herder's cultural nationalism.

Herder conducted massive researches into the culture of Germany and other countries. He wrote much more about linguistics, folklore and customary law than he did about political theory. The emphasis on 'authentic' popular culture and its connection with political legitimacy was part of the genuine transvaluation of French values performed by the Counter-Enlightenment in Germany. Mazzini's transvaluation of French values was largely rhetorical and he rather desperately tried to deny his own reliance on the ideas of the French Revolution.

Mazzini did not so much transvalue the nationalist ideas of the French Revolution as deny their importance in the Revolution, their connection with France, and ultimately their 'Frenchness'. Mazzini had read a lot of philosophy. He had gained something of a reputation as a literary critic. However, he knew virtually nothing about the 'popular cultural' subjects that Herder used to identify and celebrate national cultures. The fact that much of Italy's national tradition and cultural achievement was already identified with European culture did not recommend a genuinely cultural nationalism to Mazzini. Grimm's researches into the folklore and customary law of Germany fed German nationalism. Italy's traditions of Roman law and classical epics were more European than they were Italian. They could not be used convincingly to justify a redrawing of political boundaries along nationalist lines.

For Herder the most important element of national culture was language. Mazzini flirted with language as a marker of nationality as he did with tradition and descent and virtually all the other 'objective' criteria with which nationalists have justified their nationalisms. Language was the crucial determinant of political borders for Herder because he regarded it as so fundamental to humanity. Mazzini made no such argument for language or any other criterion of nationality. For him language was merely a marker of nationality and not a justification of nationalism. Language and other cultural markers were important to Mazzini because they provided clues to the divine will rather than because they expressed anything fundamental about human beings that had profound consequences for political legitimacy. Language and other objective criteria helped people discover into which particular nations God wanted them to associate and which particular missions He wanted those nations to pursue:

> To reconstruct the map of Europe, then, in accordance with the special mission assigned to each people by their geographic, ethnographic, and historical conditions, was the first step necessary for all.[29]

The clue that Mazzini thought best indicated the divine will for nation-formation expressed nothing about human beings. It was geography. Mazzini often liked to sketch the political map of Europe he hoped to see after the triumph of nationalism.[30] These maps paid little attention to cultural and historical factors but Mazzini's projected nations were geographically coherent:

> By the courses of the great rivers, in the lines of the high mountains, and other geographical features God has marked the natural borders of nations … Nationalities appear to me to have been traced long ago by the finger of Providence on the map of Europe.[31]

The German conception of cultural nationalism was problematic for an Italian because Italy lacked a common culture even more than most nineteenth-century putative nations. Italy, unlike France and Germany, had very obvious borders in the Alps and the Mediterranean and Adriatic seas. Mazzini did not follow the cultural nationalism of the Germans but he did adopt an objectivist definition of the nation. Geography was a much more objective

criterion of nationality than its competitors. Culture, language and history, although very rarely freely chosen by individuals, were all man-made. Geography was God's creation.

Mazzini combined the objectivist and subjectivist definitions of the nation. The objective criterion, the evidence that association amongst a particular group was God's will, was necessary for right-acting. However, for a true nation to be formed, the people must take God's hint and freely associate and dedicate themselves to the national mission. The link between the two definitions of the nation was Mazzini's conception of liberty. He thought that liberty meant the freedom to do the right thing. He also thought that liberty was about self-realisation.[32] For Mazzini these were not two conceptions of liberty but two different ways of saying the same thing. Both doing the right thing and self-realisation meant the performance of a mission. Mazzini thought he had effected a marriage of self-choosing and right-acting by means of the realisation of a divinely implanted essence. Individuals or nations would act according to the missions that God had assigned them. Thus, they would be both realising their own individuality and conforming to God's law.

While different individuals had different missions they were all acting within one overall divine scheme. Mazzini's diversity was the diversity of a single division of labour. There was no such emphasis on the individual characters and special abilities of nations in the writings of Lamennais. Lamennais was much more universalist and much less nationalist. His conception of the people as the interpreter of God's law is a populist Catholicism. While Mazzini's nations had different characters which were expressed in different missions, Lamennais' peoples were more like dioceses all living according to one law. The people replaced the Pope fairly straightforwardly and there was no mention of different nations having distinctive missions.

A mission was personal in that it was to be performed by a person specially qualified to perform it. Such personal missions were also national in that they were not self-regarding but aimed towards the progress of one's countrymen. The fusion of self-choosing and right-acting by means of self-realisation involved a coalescence of individual motives and collective purposes. The idea of mission established harmony between self-choosing and right-acting and between individual and collectivity:

> Sovereignty exists neither in the 'I' nor the 'We'; it exists in God, the source of Life; in the PROGRESS that defines life; in the Moral Law that defines Duty. In other terms Sovereignty is in the IDEAL … But the knowledge of the *ideal* needs an *interpreter* who may forthwith indicate the means that may best attain to it, and direct its application to the various branches of activity. And as this interpreter must embrace within itself the 'I' and the 'We', Authority and Liberty, State and Individual; and as moreover it must be progressive, it cannot be a man or any order of men selected by chance or by the prerogative of a privilege unprogressive by its very nature, or birth, or riches, or aught else. Given the principles contained in the contract of faith and brotherhood, this interpreter can only be the People, the Nation.[33]

The notion of mission defined freedom for Mazzini. It also defined what groups were entitled to freedom. Groups without missions were not nations and

were not entitled to statehood.[34] At their most basic missions were a duty to make a specific contribution to the progress of mankind. Like those of other nineteenth century authors, Mazzini's writings frequently contain the word 'Progress', always with a capital 'P'. For Mazzini, as for many of his contemporaries, political theory and philosophy of history were inseparable.

4. PHILOSOPHY OF HISTORY

Mazzini believed that history was divided into clearly identifiable epochs which were defined by 'principles'. According to Mazzini's philosophy of history the epoch in which one principle triumphed in theory was that in which the principle that had previously being intellectually dominant was implemented in practice.[35] Mazzini thought that the previous two millennia, beginning with Christianity and culminating in the French Revolution, had been the epoch of the individual and individual rights.[36] He himself was living during a period of transition between the epoch of the individual and the epoch of 'Association'.[37] Therefore, the ideas of the French Revolution were no longer representative of the vanguard of progressive Europe and France was no longer qualified to lead the European nations.[38]

Mazzini's statements on individual rights have produced starkly contrasting interpretations. Some describe him as a liberal, others as a totalitarian and others as plain confused. Mazzini's philosophy of history can elucidate his position on individual rights. Mazzini thought that his own lifetime was the period in which individual rights would finally be put into practice. Since Mazzini believed that the progress of history entailed the gradual discovery of God's law he thought his duty was to fight for the triumph of individual rights. Indeed, it was not until their triumph that the principle of association could move from theory to practice. This was consistent with a support for rights that viewed them as only transitionally and negatively important. Such an interpretation makes a lot of sense in the political context of Mazzini's time. Especially before 1848 what was important was whether someone was for or against the *ancien régime*, not exactly what sort of system they wanted to see replace it. Mazzini supported an alliance with liberals although he disagreed strongly with them.[39] This idea of an alliance with liberalism because of the merely transitional and negative importance of rights is evident in the following passages:

> It matters little also for what I now desire to say, whether the result of the struggle ought to be, as some imagine, the absolute abolition of the principle of authority and the pure and simple enthronement of liberty; or whether, as I believe, the future holds a great *collective* religious manifestation … What is certain is that transformation implies death, and that the new authority can never be founded until after the complete overthrow of that which now exists … The destruction of authority such as it now exists; the proclamation of human liberty, whether as a means or as the end — this is the problem which Europe now has to solve.[40]

> [A]ll the theories of government founded upon distrust, suspicion, resistance, liberty *per se*, or antagonism between the governing power and the governed …

> are characteristic of a period of transition; a generous but temporary protest against an abnormal and tyrannical condition of things, but inefficacious and incapable of constituting a normal and fruitful national life.[41]

> Wherever government — corrupt or behind the age — has no true educational mission … surround yourselves with guarantees, so long as you can do no better. Only do not erect into a final theory what is but a sad temporary necessity.[42]

Mazzini took from Hegel the idea of 'sublation' which meant that when a principle ceased to be the ruling principle of its day it was not abandoned but preserved and transcended.[43] Individual liberties would be preserved in the epoch of association but the assertion of self-interested rights would no longer be the ruling principle of politics. Individuals would still be self-choosing but their self-choosing would be fused to the right-acting of the national mission. Like the Germans, Mazzini did not simply reverse what he saw as French values: he incorporated them in his system but downgraded their status.

Similarly, Mazzini envisaged the nation itself as only a temporary contribution to the progress of humanity which would one day be superseded. He believed that mankind would only truly be living according to God's law when mankind was politically and religiously unified. God did not intend that mankind would permanently live according to numerous national value systems, or numerous national interpretations of His Law. Mazzini thought that the less political units there were, the closer mankind would have come to the perfect union of religion and politics:

> Humanity is a single body and ought to be governed by a single Law.[44] [And elsewhere,] The law of life cannot be *wholly* accomplished except by the united work of *all*. And for every great advance, for every discovery of a portion of that law, history shows a corresponding extension of human association, a wider contact between peoples and peoples.[45]

Mazzini's philosophy of history was very similar to Hegel's. Moreover both believed that self-choosing and right-acting could be fused if the individual were to identify with the 'universal'. Mazzini, as the above quotation shows, meant universal in a quite literal and ordinary sense. He wanted people to act in the interests of the progress of humanity although he thought that for the foreseeable future the best way to do so would be to identify with one's nation. Hegel dismissed dreams of literal universality like Mazzini's and thought that the most universal entity with which people could identify was the modern 'state'. He wrote,

> The nation-state is the spirit in its substantial rationality and immediate actuality and is therefore the absolute power on earth; each state is consequently a sovereign and independent entity in relation to others.[46]

Since the state was the ultimate value, international relations were inevitably antagonistic. This was the opposite of the fraternal co-operation that Mazzini

hoped would pave the way for eventual religious and political unification. All national missions were, in some sense, meant to contribute to the eventual unification of mankind. The content of a particular nation's mission could be discovered by a study of the group's history and the needs of the contemporary world. For example, Mazzini thought the greatest achievements of Italy's past were the Roman Empire and Roman Catholicism. Both in their time, had managed to unify Europe, one politically and the other religiously. In the nineteenth century Europe was once again in need of unity but this time it would have to be both political and religious. Italy's past made her well qualified to inspire a new European unity based on nationality which was the fusion of religious dogma and political choice. Men were not ready for world unification. Nations were an intermediate stage between the *ancien régime* and the new world unity. They would form a basis for the achievement of a new unity on the basis of freedom and equality.[47] Mazzini's nationalist maps divided Europe into 13 or 14 equal sized states. Beyond national unity Mazzini envisaged European unity before world unity.

Mazzini's view of nationalism and universality can also be usefully contrasted with that of Herder. Both Mazzini and Herder wrote about 'Humanity' in a mystical fashion.[48] Mazzini's Humanity was intended to assume a very concrete form in the future. Herder's philosophy had no post-national ramifications for political geography. He envisaged Humanity not as the eventual religious and political unity of humankind but as an expression of the 'multitudinous harmony' of the cultures of different nations.[49] Herder's cultural nationalism would fragment rather than unify mankind. Ernest Gellner calculated that if the language criterion were implemented there would be about eight thousand nation-states in the world.[50] Mazzini favoured not only the unification of Italy and Germany but also of all the Scandinavian states, of non-Russian Slavs under Polish leadership, and the unification of the Balkans under Greek leadership. He denied that smaller groups like the Danes and the Irish had any mission to Humanity. In the case of Ireland he suspected that all the nationalists wanted was better government. This was a utilitarian argument which proved that the Irish had no conception of their religious duty to mankind and no contribution to offer to the progress of humanity.[51]

5. CONCLUSION

It was mentioned in the introduction that Mazzini's political thought has been interpreted in three main ways: as liberal, as totalitarian, and as so confused as to be impossible to study meaningfully. This article suggests a fourth image of Mazzini which focuses on how his combination of the subjectivist and objectivist definitions of the nation aimed to reconcile self-choosing and right-acting. This approach has three main advantages over its rivals.

First, it does not have to deny the validity of other interpretations and goes some way towards reconciling them. Mazzini's thought seems confused between liberalism and totalitarianism because he genuinely wanted the best of both — the self-choosing of one and the right-acting of the other. Mazzini

did oscillate between these two positions but he also tried to synthesise them. This is evident in his combination of the subjectivist and objectivist definitions of the nation. He combined them by presenting a conception of liberty which equated self-realisation with doing the right thing. For Mazzini this meant fulfilling one's own personal mission by identifying with the mission of a nation-state.

The second advantage of the approach taken in this article is that Mazzini's greatest influences attempted a similar project. Rousseau, Lamennais, Herder and Hegel all attempted to join self-choosing to right-acting by means of the identification of the individual's will with the values of a political community. This similarity is especially important in interpreting such an obviously derivative thinker as Mazzini.

The third advantage is that an emphasis on self-choosing and right-acting fits into the political context in which Mazzini wrote. He constantly castigated his rivals for neglecting either self-choosing or right-acting. 'Egoism', or self-choosing without right-acting, was the charge he usually levelled against others who struggled against the *ancien régime*. Liberals were accused of advocating the egoism of the individual, socialists the egoism of class, and other nationalists the egoism of the nation. Apologists for the *ancien régime*, Mazzini believed, argued for an outdated and unjust authority which denied that self-choosing was necessary for right-acting. Mazzini himself wanted a union of self-choosing and right-acting. His famous slogan was "God and the People!"

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NOTES

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